

SEARCH FOR REALITY: Part I

## “The Dark Night of the Soul”



Lectures on Personal Growth

by

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# “The Dark Night of the Soul”

*Man's Instinctive Search for Reality*



ORE than three hundred years ago, a Spanish mystic, San Juan de la Cruz, St. John of the Cross, wrote an extraordinary book entitled “The Dark Night of the Soul.”

Though comparatively unknown to the modern reader, this is perhaps one of the greatest documents in Christian symbolism on a mystical level. All the boundaries between the faiths of men are annihilated, not by words, but by the import of the message. The terms used are so broadly derived from the great sources of man's mystical insight, that we find the same thought as we learn in India, China, Egypt, or Greece.

The message of this book is from a level of personal inspiration which demonstrates beyond all controversy that man's search for reality is one, regardless of his race, his people, or his time. It presents certain insight which, it seems to me, is invaluable to us today. Our purpose is not to attempt an analysis of the book, therefore, but rather, to interpret certain parts of it in terms of our present problems and our continuing emergency.

In this work, the experience of the mystic clarifies beyond question, for himself at least, the basic division of the human personality as this division was known throughout ancient times. The book assumes that man has three

natures, or parts, of which the highest and first is essentially spiritual; the second, psychic, or belonging to the sphere of soul; and the third, material, bodily or corporeal, relating to the realm of body.

This three-fold division is to be found in all the religions and philosophies of the past, and although it has been assailed, to some degree, by the modern materialistic approach to knowledge, this approach is not sustained by the inner experience of man. Materialism is not man's natural way; it is a way forced upon him by exterior factors, or by the confusion in his own nature and life.

Man is subject to confusion upon two levels. The first is the confusion of body; that is, the pressure of opinion as it moves in upon him from experience. He sees himself living in a confused world, and while he depends upon his sensory perceptions for his orientation, he can use his faculties only to observe and estimate the nature of confusion. He finds himself everywhere surrounded with problems; he observes the inconsistencies of the world in which he lives; he reads with sorrow the bloodstained pages of history; he remembers with sadness in himself the conflict of religions, philosophies, and creeds, and how the various noble ideals of the race have never been able to dominate the ordinary conduct of the majority of mankind.

The second source of confusion is within man himself, for as he exists outwardly in a world of opinions, so, to a measure, he lives inwardly in the same way. The confusion of his outer life moves in upon him, affecting his attitudes and his thoughts. Furthermore, there is within

him a powerful psychic organism which, in turn, also exists in a kind of confusion natural to itself.

St. John of the Cross points out that all confusion does not come from the world; part of it comes from the immaturity of man's inner life. He turns within himself and does not find the concord which he desires and needs. He observes that the soul itself is darkened; that it exists in a condition of opinion and of sense; that it is moved about by thoughts and emotions; and that there is very little stability ordinarily available to man from the inner part of his own life. Even though there be a certain principle of stability, he is unable to command it in his daily needs. Therefore, he is a confused being, finding little if any orientation, unable to depend upon the things around him or the power within him.

This double confusion, this great sorrow, causes man to move from within himself, also, with excess of attitude, selfishness, opinionism, and various convictions that may or may not be founded in fact. The inner life of man is not factual merely because it is within him, any more than the world around him is non-factual merely because it is a world around him. The human being cannot, therefore, take the simple position that all from within is good and all on the outside is bad. He cannot depend totally on the guidance of his own instincts, any more than he can depend upon the advice of his neighbors. These instincts may, in some cases, lead him in good ways, but in other cases, they are obviously insufficient in time of emergency.

Thus San Juan gives us a pattern in which he points out that just as man lives physically in a condition of un-

certainty, so the soul in man has an uncertainty of its own kind. Just as the outward person has dispositional characteristics that may afflict him, so the soul, likewise, has characteristics that afflict it. Therefore, if man's physical life is one of confusion, his psychic life, although on a different level, will also be one of confusion. But the confusion of the soul is more dangerous than that of the body, which relates to externals only, for confusion of the soul means disorder not in itself alone, but also in the body. Therefore, as the soul must lead the body, its own uncertainties become a particular and peculiar affliction—one upon which the individual must meditate with some calmness.

Borrowing almost word for word from the Eastern religious writers, San Juan points out that the two great enemies of integration within man are his mind and his emotions. These two forces, which should illuminate him and bring him closer to reality, have up to now, in the common experience of man, had a tendency to darken him, bringing him into further confusion. They have beset him with intellectual and emotional difficulties that can be more dogmatic, more tyrannical, than any external situation. That we should have war in the world, is a great tragedy; but that we should have war in the soul, is a still greater tragedy. And as long as the brotherhood of man is not factually established in society, we must assume there is war in the soul. For the soul alone, through its health and normalcy, can finally bestow peace on the body and on the world of which man is a vital part.

This thinking, then, is very close to the teaching of Buddha, who placed the responsibility for most human

difficulties upon the mind and the emotions. Buddha and San Juan unite also in another conviction; namely, that in some mysterious and wonderful way, the mind and emotions must be educated. They must be given to understand, and to know their relation to, the total life of the individual. There is a practical point that comes from this reflection, and we can apply it directly to the world of psychological research around us.

Today, the tendency in psychology is for man to release the soul upon the body. He is taught to believe that by the extraversion of his psychic life, he will escape from the neurosis of internal pressure. The mystic, however, in all times, has doubted this, and for very good reason; namely, that the individual, presented mentally and emotionally with the confusion of consciousness, is unable to cope with this confusion. The mere fact that he extraverts is not solutional, inasmuch as it brings him increased incentive to follow inner confusion rather than outer; and as the inner is more dangerous than the outer, the mere objectification of his own undisciplined internal, is not the solution to his problem. If he merely extraverts, and merely does what he feels like doing forever—if he merely permits the locked content of his life to flow into objectivity—he opens a Pancora's box and, in many instances, finds himself in a desperate situation.

San Juan points out the problem of disciplining the small child. He tells us, for example, that it is not reasonable or practical or good that the small child should simply do as it pleases. That it should have opportunity for self-expression is good, but that it should grow without discipline, means that ultimately it will place a heavy

burden upon society. It is not good that the child should regard every restriction upon its action as a frustration. It must learn to recognize that many so-called frustrations actually are, or must become, voluntary sacrifices for the common good.

The individual cannot live by himself alone and for himself alone; he cannot feel that the full expression of his own intentions is the solution to the social problem. He must educate, redeem, and enlighten his intentions before he can be safely regarded as a proper citizen of any community. Consequently, life without discipline can never be a good life. Life in which the individual places no restrictions or restraints upon his own instincts will always be a life of confusion, and the mere objectifying of this confusion is hardly likely to constitute a remedy.

Ultimately, of course, every action of man must be regarded as remedial. The individual living long enough without discipline becomes so helplessly involved in an undisciplined career that discipline becomes obviously necessary to him; and ultimately he must accept it. But this is the long difficult road, the road of trial and error, consisting of so much trial and so much error that the entire advancement of humanity is endangered.

Early in the story of man, the Pythagoreans, Buddhists, Platonists, Confucianists, Taoists, and Christians pointed out the importance of a kind of discipline without which the individual can never attain his own internal and eternal maturity. Maturity is a motion toward self-responsibility; it is also a motion to common responsibility; and without the acceptance of responsibility, no individual can live a good life. The person who rejects responsibility

and attempts to be an isolated individual, living merely for the gratification of his own desires, rejecting involvements that endanger this liberty—this person does not live well.

Actually, the imposing of discipline upon our external life comes to us largely in the form of responsibilities. The average person becomes involved in situations in which he must assume a certain burden. He may continually rebel against this burden, but it is his, and he must face it with courage and conviction if he is to win his own self-respect. Thus, discipline becomes a very vital circumstance.

Pythagoras pointed out that the life of wisdom is the life of discipline, and this, to a large measure, is the burden of the message of San Juan. This Spanish mystic, however, goes further into the problem of discipline. He points out that discipline of the mind and discipline of the emotions are very difficult to attain, but even more difficult is the discipline of the soul. For just as surely as the uncontrolled body will go into excess with its thoughts and emotions, so the undisciplined soul, rejecting the true nature of its proper place in the economy of existence, remains a child in a growing body. And it is the growing up of the soul—its maturing, its acceptance of the peculiar responsibilities of its own nature—that must lead ultimately to the solution of the human problem.

The soul of man, therefore, is not something apart; something that must always be followed, and never be led. It is not something that cannot be denied, or to which the body, mind, and emotions must become servants. The

soul itself must become a servant, and when the soul is in service to reality, it is enlightened. It is this conviction, this discipline, this gradual redemption of soul itself, which, according to San Juan, is the mystery of the great alchemical transmutation; the attainment of the true stability of the psychic life. Without this internal stability, all other labor is in vain.

Being by nature a mystic, San Juan was born into this world with a yearning or longing after truth and reality that was stronger than in the life of the average person. He was undoubtedly a contemplative lad—one given to a meditative existence, and early in life he turned to the Church. He died in the service of this discipline, which he regarded as utterly and completely essential to the final integration of man as a being. Yet throughout his entire little mystical work, San Juan does not mention the Church specifically, nor any of the creeds or doctrines with which we are most familiar. He is not concerned with them; he is concerned only with the direct adventure through which he himself has passed and which he tries to leave to the world as an example, or incentive, or solution—an inspiration to those who may have similar intent and purpose.

Let us, then, consider the mysterious ten-runged ladder of illumination, as San Juan expresses it and seeks to unfold it. He points out that in our daily experience, for some reason, the average person seems to have greater memory of his sorrows than of his joys. He constantly feels himself restricted or burdened, and he develops certain basic animosities against life. The prejudices and opin-

ions with which he burdens his inner life, bear witness primarily to his own immaturity.

The individual must therefore recognize that in this life, there is purpose; that we live not merely to suffer; that there is no particular merit or good in mere suffering, but that what we call suffering is a constant reminder to us of our own insufficiencies. We must learn to so accept it, and to realize that it is God's way of reminding man of man's own need, and not merely something to be borne with patience or against which we should rebel with mental or emotional arrogance. Suffering is the challenge of reality constantly besetting us. It can attack in us nothing but our own weakness, and disturb only that which has not yet tranquility within itself. Suffering is possible only because the individual is himself out of integration; he is not able to accept values for what they are.

The moment the individual is greater than his problem, he can no longer suffer from it, and it is no longer a possible source of evil. Having thus overcome this situation in his own consciousness, he no longer regards the world and other persons as evil, but recognizes that when problems beset him, it is because the universe imposes discipline upon that which does not discipline itself. Just as a good parent must sometimes discipline the child, and the child at the moment resents that discipline and enters into a private psychological world of his own, filled with self-pity and a sense of injustice, so the soul itself, and the mind and the emotions, whenever presented with discipline, are inclined to develop self-pity. The individual becomes sorry for himself instead of being

sorry for the mistake he made, and this is a very serious misinterpretation of value, for it leads us constantly into dangerous byways.

If, therefore, discipline is so vital and necessary—something that we so desperately and continuously need—how shall we accept this discipline? San Juan is a mystic, and he points out the utter futility of this tremendous conflict between good and evil which we have waged since the dawn of time. When man arms himself with every possible resource, and exerts every effort to rationalize his way out of his own dilemma, he is following an ineffective path. The individual merely becomes complicated rather than clarified. The more he attempts to justify himself, the more dishonest the universe becomes, because he is always justifying himself at the expense of truth. If truth were understood and actually applied to a problem, it would result in the complete disintegration of the problem. The problem exists only because man is wrong.

This is a very large thought, and one which many persons will resent, because the one thing we all resent, perhaps more than anything else, is to be charged with being wrong. Each individual feels a strange and peculiar rightness in himself. Yet we must face the fact that it is an illusion to feel right if, at the same time, we are constantly miserable; to believe we are correct in our attitudes, and yet fail to achieve constructive results with these attitudes. And if we have not the courage to face it, then we must continue to drift according to the present concept of things.

In the way of mysticism, therefore, as San Juan points out, the individual is not constantly attempting to impose one code or one creed or one concept upon another. Progress is not merely the perpetual exchange of concepts; it is not the individual trying this, finding it fails, and then trying that. He will try everything, but as long as *he* remains the same, he will destroy the merit in everything he tries because his own weakness will make all systems fail for him, even as his own strength would make any system succeed. Thus the strength and weakness in himself are imposed upon the things he believes, and they become strong or weak according to his own nature; not according to their own natures.

If there be truth in the belief that man must sometime, somewhere, find release from the pressures of his own nature, where shall he begin? San Juan said that the way to begin is by gradually coming to realize—not by a great intellectual effort, but by a simple internal receptivity to truth—that man is not necessarily right. In the overcoming of the sense of individual rightness, the person is released from a whole sequence of defense-mechanisms.

The beginning, then, is to become open, to relax our own egoism, to become capable of taking a receptive attitude, so that instead of continually defending our position, we come quietly to examine the essential integrity of our position to discover, first of all, whether or not it is defensible. As we relax, we simply permit all coloring due to pressure to fade away, removing from every action the intensity which deforms it. Gradually, we can come to face the fact of action, in its own nature and

substance. We can begin to perceive that all that we have and are, in terms of an objective being, results from a certain basic concept which we hold. If this concept is wrong, we are wrong totally; if this concept is right, we are right totally.

This rightness or wrongness cannot be so immediately distinguished, for in the confusion of living, we do some things well and some things badly. But unfortunately, we do some things well from wrong motives and some things badly from good motives, and we are never able to clarify; we can only hope. Yet if there is an integration of motives, if motive itself is organized and understood, then gradually we establish practical patterns for living—patterns that have perpetual value and upon which we can slowly learn to depend, fully realizing that they will not betray us. Our great problem is the fear that we will be betrayed from within ourselves, or perhaps that we are betraying ourselves now and do not know it.

In mysticism, the road to integration always lies in quietism, and San Juan points this out very clearly and definitely. He says that until quietism is attained, through certain continuing discipline, no individual is in a position to know the truth. For the truth is not something that is instantly available *in spite* of what we are; it is something ultimately available *because* of what we are. The mere fact that we seek truth, that we believe in it and long for it, or that we create definitions for it—this compound process is not sufficient.

The individual, to attain to the state of true internal enlightenment, must recover first from confusion. We

like to assume that there is a spirit somewhere in space which will assist us to end confusion; that there is a kind of divine being that will save the world and save us. San Juan says that this is not really the way it works; that actually, religion, as a way of life, is man's inclination to earn the presence of the spirit; that until he earns it, he is not entitled to it. And the only way that man can earn it, is by the attainment of quietude in his own consciousness. In other words, the individual must make a voluntary dedication of himself, and until he does this, he is not entitled to any special consideration, nor is he entitled to peace of mind or peace of soul.

All things that are good must be earned, and for man, earning is a single process—one that is the same among all peoples: the individual must become capable, within his own compound nature, of bearing the weight of truth. He must be capable of accepting into himself the impress of superior things, and he cannot do this while his objective nature is burdened with inferior things. San Juan then tells us that the disciplines necessary for the individual are therefore the disciplines of relaxing away from those causes which perpetuate confusion, both in the self and in the environment.

The true religious life is one in which man attains his own peace, and by this attainment, through love and faith, becomes worthy of religion. Religion is not a crutch; it is a doorway leading into a larger world of experience. But man must open the door with the strength and courage of his own ability, and pass the testing that leads to the door with the integrity of his own soul.

It has been observed that one of the quickest and easiest ways to be uncomfortable in this world is to try to dedicate oneself to a noble code of conduct. The moment we try to live better than others, we find the burden of our own effort and integrity bringing upon us new problems, new responsibilities, and new decisions. Instead of this consecration immediately clarifying confusion, it most immediately augments it. The individual striving to be better than others, finds himself increasingly alone; fewer and fewer understand him, and one by one, the bonds which tie him to the common body of mankind seem to break. He comes ultimately to a kind of aloneness in which his entire strength must be derived from himself; and in this aloneness, there are certain values he must contemplate.

San Juan points out that this, again, is due to a basic error that man makes; namely, the concept that he grows by being different. This in itself is wrong. The belief of the individual that when he loses certain external things, he has suffered a deprivation, is also wrong, for while he takes this attitude, he is still bound to the world of mind and emotion, or of thought and sense.

Actually, the disciplining of consciousness does not divide man from society unless this discipline has fallen into the keeping of the mind and emotions. If man places his mind or his emotions as the disciplining powers, it becomes an artificial achievement rather than a natural way of life. He then comes out of harmony with a world that does not discipline its mind and emotions. Therefore he becomes different. This is not the answer.

The way of mysticism is not one of an aggressive separation between the individual and society. It is totally an internal experience. It is an experience in which the individual changes first, and rationalizes the change afterwards, if at all. In fact, those who have changed the most, no longer rationalize the changes in any way. The person who says, "I am better, therefore I suffer," is consequently under a delusion. He is not suffering because he is better; he is suffering because he is not better, regardless of what he tells himself. He is not suffering because he understands more than his neighbor, but because he does not understand his neighbor enough. He may regard himself as too sensitive, too noble, too gentle, too advanced, to be able to accept the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, but real advancement conveys a kind of shock-proof factor.

The individual who is truly advancing along this path of the soul is never in a position in which whether he is misunderstood or not is of the slightest concern to him. It is not whether others understand him that is important; the important thing is that he understands others well enough so that in spite of every other consideration, his natural love for them remains unchanged or, if anything, is increased.

No growth achieved without an equivalent expansion of man's natural affection for life can be regarded as growth. Anything which causes us to be more critical, or to penetrate into the lives of others only to find more of their faults, is not growth; and no so-called growth causes us to compare our estate as more favorable than that of a less evolved person. Growth is not the individual

becoming aware of his own increasing value; it is the individual forgetting his own value in the experience of the increase of truth within himself.

This is a broad statement, and one that may cause a great many persons bad moments. But San Juan points out that it will not cause too many people discomfort because most of them will not pay any attention to it. They will say, "Yes, that is lovely and wonderful," and they will keep on being themselves. So San Juan points out the very simple fact that so long as we continue to be ourselves, we will not be good. So long as our own selves are more important to us than truth, we will have ourselves, but we will not have truth. And after we have had ourselves long enough, it becomes rather tiring, for there is no heavier burden to bear than the tyranny of the self; and while that burden remains, we are indeed sad and troubled souls.

San Juan says that this whole problem of truth should be approached with great gentleness and contrition of spirit. Many individuals in the service of truth simply perpetuate error. They fail to realize that the fundamental proof of the presence of truth is that man shall love more perfectly and serve more kindly. Truth is not determined by what we know, but by what we are, and our great problem in life is to become worthy of truth.

San Juan goes on to explain that through certain disciplines, man gains a kind of courage. Discipline in the material life of the individual is important primarily because it gives him the support of a common purpose. If a generation is disciplined, it becomes easier for the individual to discipline himself. If he is part of some structure of

religion that disciplines him, or which invites him to discipline, or reveals to him the examples of other disciplined persons, it becomes more natural and simple for him to gain confidence in the importance of discipline and to practice it himself.

Therefore, the greatest difficulty arises in an undisciplined age where human beings no longer believe in the principle of discipline, but regard personal liberty as more important than growth. To worship liberty without growing, is to end in bondage. And no people can preserve liberty unless, at the same time, it attains integrity. In spite of all despotism by man, the power to be right always remains with the individual, because his discipline is an internal problem, as it is an eternal problem.

Assuming, therefore, that the individual has come under certain disciplines; that he is gradually growing; that by degrees he is recognizing the need for the victory of an inner life over an external life, this leads him immediately inward, for he knows that the discipline of the body may not be sufficient to protect and preserve the disciplines of the soul. A person may give away all his worldly goods; he may go into the desert and live alone; he may fast, meditate and pray; he may perform extreme austerity of all kinds, but still be utterly the victim of the intemperances of his own soul. He may block symptoms, but he will not prevent the continual rise of causes within himself.

Just as surely as the small child must grow up in a confused world in which it is learning to discipline itself and is continuously resisting discipline by his elders, so man, in his psychological growth, constantly resents disci-

pline, and constantly seeks the fulfillment of his own peculiar desires—the intemperances of his will, mind, and emotions.

In his discussion of this problem, San Juan develops his wonderful commentary upon the seven poems that constitute the journey of the soul. He calls this “The Dark Night of the Soul” because he says every individual seeking an internal life must pass through a sphere of psychic darkness. The soul itself must go through a mystery of death and regeneration; a mystery of the detachment of itself from its own objective nature. It must die out of its own confusion and be born again into the grace of God. This long, dark journey of the inner self is one which each truth seeker must make in order to achieve his final end.

Yet this journey, though terrifying to the objective personality, is not terrifying to consciousness itself. There is a similarity here to the physical life of the individual. For as all physical life is bounded by certain natural problems, and all careers and achievements must come finally to the mystery of death, so the soul of man, with all its burden of accumulated insight, with all its philosophy and wisdom, with all the attainments which have come to it and enriched it, must also go down eventually to the quietness of its own grave, in order that it shall be released from the strange cycle of psychic generation.

This dark journey, then, corresponds, to a degree, to the physical life of the idealist, which seems peculiarly and heavily troubled. It seems as though martyrdom is the reward of consciousness. Persecution and all the evils that we observe in the lives of the good, have been visited

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upon those who have tried to be better. In the same way, these vicissitudes go inward and become part of the travail of the soul itself—part of the strange and mysterious Gethsemane through which it must pass and without which it cannot enter into the state of total enlightenment.

Perhaps the answer, as San Juan points it out, is very similar to what we find in the teaching of Buddha. The great sorrow, so-called, through which the human being passes—this supreme disillusionment of the soul—lies in its final and ultimate struggle with its own identity. The individual's greatest problem in all the world is to give up the significance of himself, and because of this problem, the death of selfness is a mortal struggle. It is like a man trying desperately to survive a sickness that is destroying his flesh—fighting for life in the presence of death—because this life is the symbol of his own individual existence. In a like measure, the soul, struggling always for its own individual existence, must pass in the end to the terrible crisis of the loss of that existence. And in this great struggle to survive as an individual entity, the soul burdens itself with all the errors and illusions of mortality.

Thus it happens that though men believe in God and in a universe of infinite benevolence, they still live in fear and constant anxiety, being far more inclined to cling to this flesh to the last possible moment, than to take a chance of going into the unknown, even though they accept it intellectually as a better state. Thus the struggle for the preservation of the known causes man's greatest confusion, for it causes him to cling to the evils he now has, rather than to fly to others he knows not of. There

is a total lack of the true faith and insight that enable man to move out into space, realizing that this space is God, and that there cannot, therefore, be any evil thing in it.

By faith, man should know that as surely as he himself exists, so surely is his existence essentially good, if he knows how to attain this goodness; and the evil of his existence is in his own fears and uncertainties. He is not really in danger of losing anything real, but only what he has fashioned himself, which has no foundation in reality. If what he has fashioned were real, it would endure. Therefore, man never needs to fear that the rightness in him will fail; what he fears is that the wrongness in him cannot be sustained. And it cannot; therefore, the tremendous conflict through which he passes.

San Juan then explains that from the standpoint of mysticism, all these things are made much more simple. Actually, mysticism is the child-likeness of consciousness which penetrates through all involvements and confusions and, with a single integrating power, brings order out of chaos. He says that the greatest source of help within man, which is forever available to him and will bring him ultimate security, is the simple and direct emotion of love for God. This loving of God, in the same manner that the child loves parents, in the same direct way in which the soul naturally verges toward the good—the complete willingness to accept an attitude of true regard and affection toward God—is the answer to more things than we can possibly imagine in this world.

As San Juan points out, in true love, there can be no sacrifice, inasmuch as the service of the beloved gives

man greater joy than the service of himself. If love does not make him forget self in bringing happiness to another, then he has never known love. If love does not reward itself out of itself, then it is not genuine. And if the dedication of the individual to that which he knows to be the infinite divine source of himself is not a simple, natural, and direct affection, untouched by creedal confusion or personal reservation, then this individual has not the foundation upon which to pass successfully through this strange dark mystery of the soul. The only help, the only ever present guide in time of trouble, is man's simple, natural love of God.

But how shall man attain this? All learning, all knowledge, should confer this upon him. Everything he does and everything he knows, should make it easier for him. His love should arise not only from internal sources, but from the contemplation of his own experience; from all things around him. He must gradually perceive the beauty of the Beloved, and penetrating through every mask and garment which hides it, become aware that there is nothing in this universe so important as that creatures shall come, in the end, to the complete adoration of the Creator. This sounds like a theological affirmation, and it remains so until it becomes an experience within the individual.

This concept of the lover and the Beloved is the burden of Islamic mysticism, Eastern Yoga, the Vedanta philosophy, and every enlightened religion. Man makes the problem too difficult because, with all his other attainments and accomplishments, he has failed to mature the simple power to love. He has permitted himself to obscure this power by justifying hate. He has been unable to pene-

trate appearances or to find good in those things with which he has previously been in discord.

We see too many persons claiming spiritual insight, who still live in an attitude of constant criticism and condemnation. This is because they have never experienced the fact of love within themselves. Perhaps it has been starved or stunted by the failure of personal affection, or by disillusionments. But, as San Juan points out, these disillusionments are relative; no one has been able to prove that God failed those who loved him. Here is the one place where man cannot be disillusioned in his affection. He can be disillusioned only by his own failure to penetrate the barriers of the individual isolation with which he has surrounded himself. The love of Deity can fail only because man does not truly experience it. Once it is experienced, it cannot fail.

San Juan points out that the life of mysticism begins with this great love which in itself overcomes all confusion, both of the soul and of the body. He says that the dark journey of the soul is man's soul gradually striving toward its goal, which is the pure and complete power to love. For as the mind gives man the power of reason, so the psychic life gives him the power of perpetual emotional activity. It gives him the power to feel so great and inevitable an intensity that everything else is overwhelmed.

When this feeling is directed toward the world, man weeps and shouts; he enters panic; he becomes the martyr; he passes through numerous vicissitudes. But when this power reaches inward to the source of life, it brings order out of all chaos, because life becomes an absolutely simple

procedure founded on one dynamic—man's unconditioned surrender to his own love of God.

This surrender seems a very strange and difficult thing for us to understand. And yet, just as the life of man here in this world can suddenly be greatly altered by a strong affection, so his total life can be greatly and permanently altered by a supreme affection, which is the love of God as the embodiment or personification of man's love of truth. He discovers, for example, that as this mystery unfolds within his own nature, what we call the end of knowledge is strangely and wonderfully attained in itself. Man becomes internally appreciative of true value.

Actually, man's search for knowledge is his desperate effort to overcome ignorance, and San Juan points out that ignorance is separation from God. No matter what else we may want to call it, ignorance is a state of separateness from that totality which is Deity. That which is united with God does not need knowledge, because it has already attained it.

The end of knowledge, then, is not merely that man shall learn to read and write and make elaborate mathematical calculations—these things are only instruments against error; he becomes educated so that he will not commit so many mistakes, and in the hope that he shall find a life suitable to his own needs. San Juan points out that the principle of mysticism is that man can come into an identity with life. In this identity, there is no longer any interval, and so there is no need for bridges; and all knowledge is a form of bridge, seeking to unite the known and the unknown. But when man has identified himself with totality, which is the compound of the known

and the unknown, then knowledge, as we think of it, is no longer necessary.

This is a very interesting point, because all knowledge indicates man's ignorance. Knowledge is assumed to be given to the ignorant, but as they grow further, they discover the ignorance in the knowledge itself. They find they have not found the answer. They have become learned, but not good; they have learned to be strong, but not to love; they have found many things, but they have not found God. And San Juan points out that when the knowledge becomes great enough, it so increases the confusion of the mind that it is even more difficult to find God.

If, then, we gain all knowledge, but have not gained love, we have failed not only in knowledge, but in faith or truth. Yet, at the same time, we may discover that in the experience of mystical at-one-ment, we have the straight road, the mysterious path, which requires more effort than all knowledge. This is a different kind of effort, however, whereby man learns by *becoming*, which, in the last analysis, is the end of learning. Religion, and particularly mysticism, according to San Juan, is man's learning of God by doing; by the constant practice of what another mystic called *the presence of God in all things*. Thereby he shares in a mystery that transcends all intellectual activity.

The dark night of the soul, then, is man's gradual discovery of his total dependence upon the universal spirit which exists within him and around him. It is his gradual separation through a process of perpetual disillusionment; for he must inevitably be disillusioned in every-

thing that is not so. Each of these disillusionments is a pain, a shock, a stress. Each time, he is actually giving up an error, but this error has become so much a part of his life, that he gives it up with the greatest regret.

This constant disillusionment is a continual process of finding oneself to be wrong. This is one of the most difficult stresses we face; and yet there is another way of approaching this entire matter—namely, by recognizing the supreme fact that it is not important whether we are right or wrong. The desperate effort to defend the attitudes or convictions we hold is a false loyalty, for out of all these things come only further sorrow and tribulation.

The more simple and direct way to growth is through a kindness by which we sense our individual potential for good. Thus, our life of wisdom begins not just in study, but in kindness; in the gentle recognition that there are attitudes available to us which, if we hold them with discipline and cultivate them with integrity, will slowly reduce confusion and make possible the quietude of the soul.

We should examine our lives as wisely as we can, seeking out confusion and resolving that this confusion must gradually be removed, not by neglecting responsibilities, but by placing over every action a new method of measurement and understanding. San Juan says that it is far more important to our ultimate good that we shall learn patience than that we shall escape from the causes of impatience. It is more important that we gain humility than that we gain dominion either over the minds or the attitudes of others.

There is only one path that leads man out of misery, and that path is the practice of humility, patience, and faith. These simple attitudes constitute true education. The end of learning is not that we shall know everything, but that we shall be patient with everything; not that we shall gain all things, but that we shall discover the vanity of that which is not true; not that we shall be the masters of men, but that we choose to be the servants of truth.

Man must learn to think with the eternal mind, to feel with the eternal heart, and to become one in the service of the eternal work. Only in these things does he find his completion. Therefore, all goals that merely leave their marks upon the world are false goals, and because man is enslaved in this concept of falseness, he remains confused and miserable, and his world remains in war and strife.

The dark night of the soul is the same type of thing that Plotinus describes to us in the long and difficult journey home; it is the wanderings of Ulysses, the story of the prodigal son, and the Lamentations of Job. All these are symbolical of man coming to a final decision—a decision that could come to him as gently as an afternoon breeze; but because of his own nature, he makes it stupendous and fateful.

According to the concept of San Juan, this long journey leads to a kind of home that is not a material utopia; nor is it the perfection of a scientific age; nor is it a vast economic democracy or a benevolent autocracy. The natural journey of man is simply a going out of loneliness into the presence of the only one who can ever understand. It is the return to the true home, not bringing the

wealth of attainment, but bringing that depth of understanding which alone can delight the true parent.

When a parent sends a child out into life, knowing that some day he will come home, he is not so much concerned with whether that child is rich or poor. First of all, he is going to want to see this child because of the inevitable affection and kinship; and then, if the child proves to be a fine person, rich in values, the soul of the parent is truly delighted. For the thing that gives the true parent the greatest rejoicing is to know that the soul of his child is good and happy and has found truth.

Thus, all other values become subordinate, and perhaps that is one of the reasons for the psychological division between East and West. Because Asia has for ages sought to find the soul-way, we regard it as backward. Perhaps Asia has not found the soul-way either, except in a few instances, but still the search is a lawful and legitimate goal—perhaps the most lawful and the most legitimate of all.

In each life, through all the confusion of living, the unbroken thread of the search must go on. The individual must realize that it benefits him nothing if he shall become master of the whole world, but at the same time leave his own soul in darkness. So the dark night of the soul refers to the time when the soul has not found peace or happiness, but is moved by endless restlessness and dissatisfaction because it has not set upon itself its great goal, nor dedicated its own resources to the sufficiency of its own life.

The soul that is moving naturally and simply toward truth, cannot be psychotic. There are no frustrations or

neuroses; there is only the dramatic journey which is described by Plotinus as the journey of the alone to the Alone. The individual moves out of loneliness into love, out of separateness into unity, and out of the fear of life into the love of God. This motion is the fulfillment of all things, and in it all other things are perfected. The individual will then serve others above his own good; he will be dependable as friend and advisor, kindly and understanding as associate and relative.

While man is lonely, he is frightened, and in his fear, he seeks to build defenses. He seeks for any consolation, right or wrong, that will give him a moment of respite, a second of joy in a world of uncertainties. But there can be no loneliness in God, and when the soul has returned to its home, it is mature, and right, and secure. It then becomes natural for the individual to organize, from his inner life, his material concerns and responsibilities. He will meet them and fulfill them, but always from a superior state of understanding. Therefore, his works, deeds, and thoughts will be kindly. He will be moved by the love of God, and the love of God will move through him.

San Juan also points out the great mystical conviction that the only thing that man himself can create in this whole process is receptivity to the experience of God in his own life. Man cannot demand this—he cannot insist that this must happen; nor can he storm heaven with a creed or doctrine. The individual, by himself, must enter into this quietude that arises out of the simple acceptance of the love of God.

We might wonder if such an acceptance would only bring with it a kind of infancy, where the individual, stop-

ping all the aggressive actions of life, would simply become useless and fall into a deep negation. We cannot say that the mystical life leads to negation, but false interpretation of it can. The mystical life should be moved by one powerful and dynamic emotion—the love that San Juan describes, or compassion, as it is called in Buddhism—whereby it becomes the total giving of the self to the real. Then it is a supreme adventure, and it cannot be negative.

If man attains the dedicated purpose of being the living instrument of the Divine Will, he becomes ensouled with the dynamic energy of the Divine Being. Under these conditions, he is not weak, but is, for the first time, strong. Strength is always the power of principle over circumstance, and the ultimate strength is the power of the divine love over the world. In this realization, the individual becomes the instrument of the divine emotion. He finds, also, that it forever sustains him and becomes truly his present help in time of trouble.

Thus, instead of gaining only an internal silence, in the common sense of the word, he gains also that strange dynamic silence which preceded creation, and from which all things come—the silence of the heart of God. This silence is the root of sound, and from it pours forth the fiat that fashioned the world. This is the dynamic silence of creation, the tremendous dramatic silence of new birth forever taking place—new worlds forever fashioning. For out of the silence of the infinite come the clamorings of the finite. Yet these clamorings are not as strong or as great as the silence from which they came. There is no strength in clamoring, nor virtue in much noise. The

virtue lies in life itself; in the richness of the power by which all living is possible. Therefore, in the great silence—the silence of the divine—we have the beginning of all life, all positive and purposeful existence.

From the silence that comes from peace within, is born the strength which is absolutely irresistible. For man can resist the silence of God forever, but God will win. Man can listen to the words of others forever, and man will lose, unless he finds in himself the capacity to listen to the voice of the silence, and to feel moving through himself the total power of the universe.

All these things belong to mysticism, but they also have special meaning for us today because we have turned so far from these simple values. Perhaps one of the greatest lessons we can learn from the story of the dark journey of the soul is the tremendous possibility and hope that man is not divided from truth by infinite error. He is divided only because he has never learned to love anything better than himself; and because of this simple fact, he has never given the full devotion of his own nature. For this reason, he is separate and poor. For this reason, he fails.

If, therefore, by the simple act of grace, man shall learn to love—not because he expects to be loved, but only for the privilege of serving and the right to be humble in the presence of the eternal Beloved—then he shall move away from all complexities. Then he becomes truly united with the Beloved, and in this union, he finds the end of loneliness and the beginning of the golden universe of hope. He then finds all solutions in the silence of great loving; and beyond this, he comes to

an emotion in which his own affection seems to blend itself with universal power.

For it is said that the Lord so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son. And when man shares the infinite love of the Creator that transcends all things, the infinite power which observes the sparrow's fall, the infinite universal compassion that fills all things—when man unites himself with this, he cannot fail. He moves with the ages; he is immortal and eternal.

Human beings live and die; thoughts come and go; empires rise and fall; but love is eternal. The growth and maturing of love is one of the greatest works of man—his greatest offering to the universe. In the recognition and cultivation of this work, he attains true religion, and by this attainment, he becomes capable of making a good world for himself and others.

When San Juan came to die, his friends gathered about him, and he passed out of this life as gently as he had lived. Those who were present listened while a very learned man said: "My brethren, let us not pray for the soul of this man, for his soul does not need our prayers. Let us pray, rather, that we shall be like him and that we shall find in ourselves the consolation by which he has lived."

I think this is a wonderful tribute. It is a tribute that recognizes that in the simple dedication to the work of divine love, man has achieved the most, not only in this world, but in the great universe that unfolds before him. Armed with love and simple faith, man moves serenely through the ages; and in this motion, he per-

fects the dark journey which must finally bring his soul back to God.

### SAN JUAN DE LA CRUZ

(St. John of the Cross)

1542-1591

San Juan, who gained world-wide distinction as a religious mystic, was associated with St. Theresa in the establishment of a monastery dedicated to the primitive rules of the Carmelite Order. Due somewhat to his zeal, he suffered disgrace and imprisonment for disobedience to his superiors in religion. He spent the closing years of his life in the monastery at Ubeda. At the time of his funeral, there was a sudden burst of enthusiasm over his devotion and piety, and his reputation continued to enlarge, resulting in his beatification in 1675 and his canonization in 1726.

San Juan held as his principle axiom that the soul must empty itself of all self and selfishness in order to be filled with the spirit of God. His best-known writings, dealing mostly with this theme, are: "The Ascent of Mount Carmel," "The Dark Night of the Soul," "Spiritual Canticle," and "O Living Flame of Love." Perhaps the most beautiful of these is "The Dark Night of the Soul," which was published posthumously (1619) in Barcelona. An English translation by Gabriela Cunningham Graham, was published in 1905 by John M. Watkins in London.